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AF/E FOR MARIA BEYZEROV

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MP](#)
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER DETAILS MOTIVES FOR CABINET
RESHUFFLE

REF: A. PORT LOUIS 307
[1](#)B. PORT LOUIS 312

Classified By: Ambassador Cesar B. Cabrera for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On September 12, the Prime Minister publicly announced both a long-expected cabinet reshuffle and the re-appointment of the current president to another five-year mandate. The recent cabinet reshuffle is the first reshuffle executed solely by prime ministerial initiative. In a meeting with Ambassador Cabrera, PM Ramgoolam explained his rationale for the reshuffle and for the presidential appointment. In addition to his publicly touted quest to "modernize his administration by basing his decisions on results," Ramgoolam admitted privately that his priorities were to specialize portfolios, rid himself of "overwhelming" duties, and prevent any possibility of a political alliance among the opposition parties. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) According to the Prime Minister, who spoke to Ambassador Cabrera (with POLOFF as notetaker) in a private meeting on 18 September, the PM had several key goals in the cabinet reshuffle exercise which was announced on 12 September. These goals included preventing an opposition alliance of the Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien (MSM) and the Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM) parties and streamlining ministerial duties. He expects the reshuffle will help streamline ministerial performance. For example, Ramgoolam cited the relief of Attorney General Rama Valayden's extra duty as Minister of Human Rights and Justice as an attempt to allow his Attorney General room to perform more effectively.

[1](#)3. (C) Regarding preventing an alliance between the two strongest opposition parties, the MSM and MMM, Ramgoolam said that he needs to prevent the MSM/MMM alliance "at all costs." Keeping the opposition in check was the PM's primary motivation for re-appointing Sir Anerood Jugnauth president. Ramgoolam alluded to rumors that MMM leader Paul Berenger attempted to persuade President Jugnauth not to accept the nomination, and added that Anerood Jugnauth accepted because of "his sense of duty superseded all of Berenger's arguments" and because his age limits any other options for political contribution to his country. (NOTE: Jugnauth is 78. END NOTE.)

[1](#)4. (C) (COMMENT: In recent months, Ramgoolam has come under fire for having more than one Deputy Prime Minister and for assigning the Attorney General a ministerial portfolio, both of which are against the constitution. It was perhaps surprising, given his candor otherwise, that the PM did not admit that some of the reasoning for reshuffling was to alleviate recent criticism against his government. END COMMENT.)

OPINIONS ON CABINET RESHUFFLE

15. (C) Some critics of PM Ramgoolam, like Creole community leader Father Jocelyn Gregoire, vociferously challenged the reshuffle as a lost opportunity to bring more ethnic equality to the cabinet. Gregoire's opinion reflects the struggles that Ramgoolam has in winning the Creole vote. Ramgoolam addressed this struggle in his September 18 meeting with Ambassador Cabrera by recounting the case of Etienne Sinatambou (Creole), who was the former Minister of Information Technology and the only Minister who lost his ministerial title in the reshuffle; Sinatambou was reassigned to be Deputy Speaker of Parliament. Ramgoolam spoke to the Ambassador of a discussion he had with Sinatambou before he accepted the new position as Deputy Speaker. According to the PM, Sinatambou said he was under pressure from Creole leaders not to accept the lesser position because it was "non-ministerial." Ramgoolam insinuated that the Creole leaders pressuring Sinatambou were "opportunistic."

16. (C) Opposition member Nando Bodha, MSM member and Member of Parliament (MP), praised Ramgoolam's handling of the reshuffle. In a September 17 meeting with Ambassador Cabrera, Bodha commended Ramgoolam's decision to appoint Arvin Boolell Foreign Minister and considered Boolell well suited to handle the portfolio thanks to his experience working with international organizations, such as the European Union. Bodha also commended the PM's decision to keep Anerood Jugnauth as president. Bodha, however, was convinced that

PORT LOUIS 00000331 002 OF 002

even with a new cabinet, Ramgoolam's Social Alliance will not be able to carry out its full term and insistently predicted early elections in 2009 following the release of a new budget.

PREVENTING THE MSM/MMM ALLIANCE

17. (U) When asked if Anerood Jugnauth's re-appointment as president would prevent an MMM/MSM alliance, Bodha said that the re-appointment is a peripheral move and it wouldn't affect with whom the MSM makes alliances for projected 2010 elections. This is similar to press statements made by MMM leader Paul Berenger, who said the continuing presidential mandate would have no effect on a potential MSM/MMM alliance. Likewise, in press statements, Pravind Jugnauth, MSM leader (and son of the re-appointed president) welcomed Anerood Jugnauth's re-appointment but added that it would "not stop an MMM/MSM alliance."

18. (C) In the September 18 meeting with COM, Ramgoolam conceded that the presidential re-appointment may not deter an MMM/MSM alliance, but that it was a necessary move for him to "keep all of his options open." The PM noted that he would have other opportunities to prevent the opposition party alignment, including by supporting one side or another during a possible upcoming MP bi-election. In sum, Ramgoolam said that it is too soon to broker any public alliance now and that he is more than happy to keep his options open.

RAMGOOLAM MORE POPULAR THAN HIS PARTY

19. (U) The latest Business Magazine Public opinion survey, which looked at the Government's track record and political figures' popularity, was taken in mid-August. When the public was asked about their favorite political figure as Prime Minister, Ramgoolam came first (31 percent), beating Berenger (28 percent) and Pravind Jugnauth (8 percent). Ramgoolam remains the most popular figure and has a 55

percent approval rating. Although, based on the poll, the public still considers Ramgoolam the best fit for the PM position, his Social Alliance party is not as popular. When asked for which alliance they would vote if the legislative election happened the following Sunday, 41 percent of the public said that they would vote for an MMM/MSM alliance, while only 29 percent said they would support the Social Alliance. Regarding alliance popularity, the survey shows that 49 percent of the population is favorable to the idea of a new MMM/MSM alliance, with the majority of support coming from the General Population (53 percent), followed by the Hindus (50 percent), and Muslims (39 percent). Only 32 percent would like to see another Labor Party/MSM alliance, and only 21 percent preferred a Labor Party/MMM alliance.

¶10. (C) Ramgoolam seems to have the pulse of the people. His decision to change his cabinet and his persistence to prevent an MMM/MSM alliance fit well with the latest Business Magazine bi-annual public survey published on September 17. Despite Ramgoolam's popularity and 55 percent approval rating, however, he still has some trouble within the Creole community. According to the survey, out of the 45 percent that were dissatisfied with him, 59 percent were from the Creole (or General Population) segment of Mauritian society.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) Against the public discontent and opposition pressure, Ramgoolam, ever the shrewd politician, is deflecting the blame for unpopular policies on 'old guard' cabinet members and baiting the swing opposition party (MSM) in the same breath, by reshuffling his cabinet and re-appointing MSM stalwart Anerood Jugnauth as president. Ramgoolam looks to be avoiding any public alliances and to be focusing political attention on himself instead. This could explain his rash of unilateral moves as of late, such as his unilateral decision to re-shuffle the cabinet and the unilateral decision to change constitutional law to allow him to have additional vice prime ministers. Clearly, pre-election maneuvering is underway in Mauritius.
CABRERA